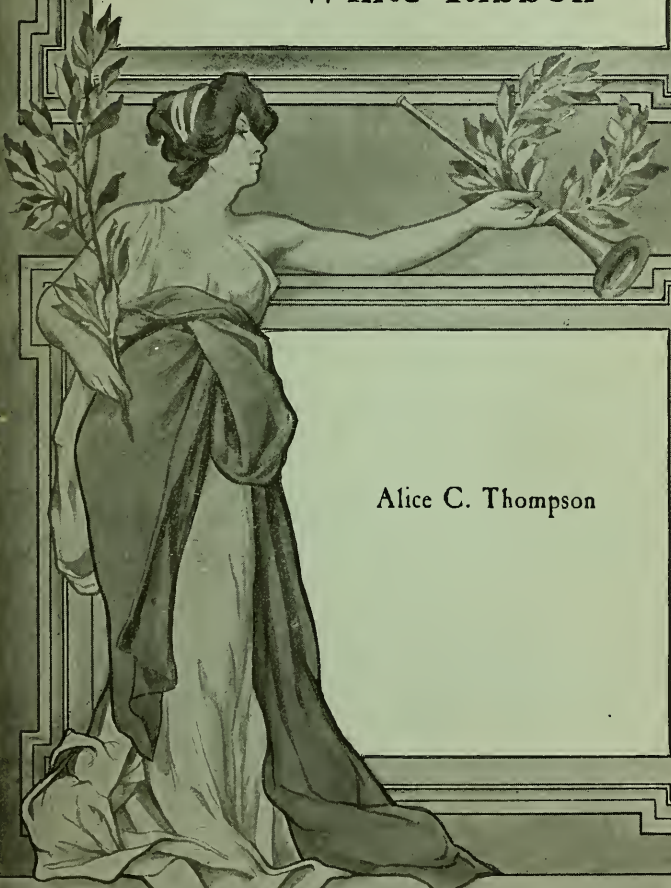


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1910

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A Knot of White Ribbon

CHARACTERS

MISS ESTHER FARLING.

MARJORIE BRANT *Her niece*

LIBBIE *An old servant*

TIME IN REPRESENTATION :—Thirty minutes.

COSTUMES

ESTHER. Any sort of quiet winter house dress will do. She should be about forty.

MARJORIE. Winter outdoor costume. Wears furs, muff, hat, gloves at entrance. She is not over twenty.

LIBBIE. Plain black dress and white apron. Sixty, and of very neat, prim appearance.

PROPERTIES

Clock, candlesticks, book, a poker, teapot, tray, cups and saucers, a small trunk, an old curtain, old quilt, pen and ink, writing paper, a light blue gown made in old-fashioned style, with a knot of old white ribbon at the waist on one side.



A Knot of White Ribbon

SCENE.—*An old-fashioned parlor. At L. is a fireplace, on mantel a clock and two tall candlesticks holding candles. In front of fire an armchair, at R. C. a rocking-chair, a small high back chair, a small table and a little old trunk or chest. A fire is burning on the hearth. Entrances at C. and down L. and R.*

(*The curtain rises to discover MISS ESTHER FARLING seated in front of fire. Her gray hair is done simply, her dress is dainty and picturesque rather than fashionable. She bends over a book.*)

(*Enter LIBBIE, L.*)

LIBBIE. Shall I turn on the light, ma'am?

ESTHER. Not yet, Libbie. I like the twilight. Is it snowing?

LIBBIE. There's a flurry of snow, and it's right cold. Is Miss Marjorie coming to-night?

ESTHER. Oh, yes, I expect her soon.

(*LIBBIE kneels, takes poker and attends to fire.*)

LIBBIE. Then we must have it good and warm for her. It's the young folks cheer us up, and the best we can do is look after 'em.

ESTHER. Oh, Libbie, you've always spoilt Marjorie.

LIBBIE. I reckon I'm not the only one.

ESTHER. I hope I haven't really spoilt her. Oh, I'm sure she is not spoilt; she is always so thoughtful of every one. But it's quite true, I would give up anything—yes, I would give up the thing dearest to me—for Marjorie.

LIBBIE (*rising*). It's not to be wondered at. When you come to think of it, there's something about an orphan that's deserving of more than ordinary folk. With all the aunties and old nurses to look after 'em, you always have a feelin'

there's something they lack. It's like a hen that's hatched out duck's eggs. For all her scratchin' and fussin' for the ducklings, you know she ain't the real mother, and when they take to the water she can't follow 'em.

ESTHER. Ah, if all orphans were as well looked after as Marjorie!

LIBBIE. Well, she hasn't got the home we had when we were young. A city's no place to grow up in.

ESTHER. Dear Roseville. I can never forget it. The dear old vine-covered house, the garden and the orchard. Sometimes I'm sorry we left it.

LIBBIE. I know I've often wished myself back in that big sunny kitchen with the smell of the apple blossom coming in at the open windy.

ESTHER. Ah, but I couldn't have stayed on there with nothing but memories. . . . It would have been too hard. My greatest regret is that Marjorie has never seen the old home.

LIBBIE (*with a sigh*). It can't be the same place, with strange folk livin' in it. And that reminds me. (*Goes to R. C.*) Here's the trunk you wanted brought down from the attic. It's been there ever since we packed it in Roseville and came away—eighteen years ago. (*ESTHER rises.*) Shall I open it?

ESTHER. Yes, do. I thought I might find some old lace for Marjorie. (*Goes to LIBBIE.*)

LIBBIE (*kneeling*). It's that stiff—the catch is rusty. (*Opens it.*) What's this? (*Brings out curtain.*) Well, I declare if it ain't one of your Grandmother Webb's tapestry curtains. I can jist see the mate of it now hangin' at the parlor door.

ESTHER (*eagerly*). So it is, yes. (*Takes curtain, handling it tenderly.*) Dear me, how the years have gone.

LIBBIE. And here's the bed-spread your Aunt Rachel worked for——

ESTHER. —— For my wedding day. I remember.
(*Holds the bed-spread to her cheek, then puts it aside on chair.*)

LIBBIE. What's this? Why, it's one of your dresses—one you wore when you were a girl, like Miss Marjorie.

ESTHER. Let me see. (*LIBBIE rises, holding up dress.*) A little blue gown.

LIBBIE. I helped you sew on it. Don't you remember?

ESTHER. Yes, now I remember. The dear little blue gown. Oh, it must have been lonely in there all these years.

LIBBIE. It's a livin' wonder the moths ain't eat it up.

ESTHER. No, the trunk is full of lavender and camphor. Just smell it, Libbie, isn't it sweet? It brings back my youth to me.

LIBBIE (*looking in trunk*). But there's no lace in here.

ESTHER. No, I shall have to look in the attic myself for it. (*Holds up the blue gown.*) See, Libbie, the pretty knot of white ribbon at the belt.

LIBBIE. It looks to me like there should be another on this side.

ESTHER. Perhaps so. It dropped off, I suppose. (*Examines dress.*) But no, I'm sure I didn't lose it—I seem to recall—ah, yes, of course I know where it went. It was Richard Mortimer who cut it off. (*Softly.*) And the day I wore the little blue gown for the first time—I promised to become his wife.

(ESTHER *puts gown on chair at R. C., and sits near fire.*)

LIBBIE. Ah, Miss Esther, 'twas a sad pity you had that quarrel, if I may say so. And you've never laid eyes on him all this long time.

ESTHER. Never, and it's twenty-one years ago. Sit down, Libbie, I feel I want to talk to you to-night. (LIBBIE *sits near her.*) That little gown seems to have brought things back. Blue was his favorite color—I remember he told me so, years ago.

LIBBIE. I've sometimes wondered why you've never spoke about him—if only to ease your mind. And Miss Marjorie doesn't know.

ESTHER. No, I haven't told her.

LIBBIE. You've kept a brave heart, Miss Esther.

ESTHER. Marjorie is such a child, and will always be a child to me, I think.

LIBBIE. Child! She's a young woman, near twenty; and if I'm not much mistaken she has her own mind bent on matrimony.

ESTHER. You mean Mr. Jack? A boy and girl affair. Besides, they've quarreled.

LIBBIE. Oh—quarreled. (*Scornfully.*) They've quarreled before—and made it up again a dozen times.

ESTHER (*smiling sadly*). In just the foolish way we used to do ourselves—only I never had a chance to make mine up, when I most wanted to.

LIBBIE. She told me she don't like Mr. Jack's red hair. It's curious the reasons there be that keep a promising girl from marrying.

ESTHER. Indeed, that's true. I've often wondered why you didn't marry that nice young baker who came to see you years ago in Roseville. You remember him, Libbie, I'm sure. He had such rosy cheeks and always a dab of flour on the end of his nose.

LIBBIE. Yes, I remember him well, nose and all. I'll tell you why I didn't marry him—though it's something I don't like to think of.

ESTHER. Confide in me, Libbie. Your secret is safe.

LIBBIE (*smiling grimly*). It's a very good reason, Miss Esther. He never asked me.

ESTHER. Oh, Libbie, how disappointing. But then there was another who came later. I think he squinted—a little.

LIBBIE. 'Tis polite to say a little. I never knew if he was lookin' at me or up at the corner of the ceiling. But I was willin' to get used to that.

ESTHER. I'm sure he wanted you.

LIBBIE. Yes'm, but there's many a slip, as they say. One summer's night when we went buggy-ridin' he was jist on the point of lettin' loose, as you might say, when the buggy upsot.

ESTHER. Oh, poor Libbie!

LIBBIE. It made me good and mad, I can tell you, but not as mad as the next time.

ESTHER. Did he try again?

LIBBIE. He did, poor Amos, and 'twas in the parlor of the Widow Scrubbins' house where we was asked to tea on a Sunday. We was jist gittin' along fine and I was picturin' myself in a white gown with a lace veil, when—oh, I'll never forget it as long as I live.

(*Buries face in hands.*)

ESTHER. Good gracious, Libbie, what happened?

LIBBIE. The door opens sudden and the Widow Scrub-

bins bursts in with this, "Do you like your pancakes fried in lard or in drippin's?" I remember her very words, and I've hated pancakes and red-haired people ever since. She had red hair.

ESTHER. Poor Amos, fate was against him. And so that was the end of it.

LIBBIE. Oh, Amos was fairly persistin', and he took another chance. This time 'twas in my sister Ellie's back settin'-room where that little furrin clock was that Uncle Ez brought her back from Europe. Well, poor Amos was coming along grand. He was jist a-goin' to put his arm round my waist when that cussed little bird—'scuse me, ma'am—hopped out and says, "Cuckoo, Cuckoo, Cuckoo," no less'n twelve times. Sister Ellie comes in and says she, "I think there's something has gone wrong with it inside." "Oh, bust it!" says Amos, and he wouldn't even stay to supper. Next week he went over to Petersville and married Sally Larkins. Life's a queer thing. Sometimes it seems to me like a mess o' pickle, all short ends mixed up in mustard. (*Rises and goes to R. C.*) Shall I put these things back in the trunk?

ESTHER. No—wait a minute. (*Rises and goes to her.*) I want to have another look at them. (*Picks up dress.*) Libbie, I wonder if I could wear this now?

LIBBIE. No, no, where's the use?

ESTHER. But just to try it on, Libbie. There's no harm in that. I will. (*Goes to L. with gown over arm.*) Oh, who's that? (*Enter MARJORIE BRANT, C. She wears winter costume with furs, and there are snowflakes on her hair. ESTHER hastily tosses gown on chair.*) Marjorie!

MARJORIE. Yes, here I am back home. (*Kisses her.*) And Libbie. (*Takes her hands.*) Oh, what a snow-storm. I thought I'd never get here.

(*Shakes snow from clothing. LIBBIE helps her off with furs and jacket.*)

ESTHER. Welcome, dear. You look like a snowbird. Oh, how glad I am to have you back.

MARJORIE. Three weeks away. Has it seemed a long time? I've enjoyed myself so much.

LIBBIE. Indeed, Miss Marjorie, it's seemed more like a year. I'm right glad to see you back. Let me take your things into the kitchen to dry off. Then I'll make you a

cup of tea and you can have it in here all cozy by the fire.

MARJORIE. Oh, thank you, Libbie, you are good to me.

(Exit L., with furs, etc.)

ESTHER *(tenderly)*. Well, dear, come and tell me all about your gay doings.

(Draws her to fire, and they sit.)

MARJORIE *(enthusiastically)*. Oh, I've had a perfect time. Every one was so kind. Katherine wanted me to stay longer, but I thought two weeks long enough, as I simply had to stop off for a week at Aunt Clara's on my way home.

ESTHER. And how is Aunt Clara?

MARJORIE. Very well. She sent her love. It was quieter there than at Katherine's, of course, but I enjoyed it. Katherine gave a dance for me. It was perfect.

ESTHER. And did you make lots of friends—as you always do?

MARJORIE *(confidentially)*. Yes, and one in particular. Such a handsome, clever man. He's not young, but awfully popular—and wealthy. I tell you I felt quite flattered at being singled out by him. And, Aunt Esther, I may as well confess, I'm afraid I—flirted a little.

ESTHER. Oh, Marjorie, Marjorie, how could you? I thought you had given that up. And have you forgotten poor Jack? *(Smiles.)*

MARJORIE. Jack! When I compare the two, Jack seems such a boy. And besides, his hair is red—carrotty red. And you know I hate red hair.

ESTHER *(laughing softly)*. Why, you're as bad as Libbie. And why this unreasonable prejudice against red hair?

MARJORIE. Well, haven't you noticed, Aunt Esther, that all red-haired men are over-confident? Jack seemed to think —

ESTHER. Well, what?

MARJORIE. Oh, nothing—he doesn't care a thing for me anyway—not a thing.

ESTHER. And are you going to see this new friend again?

MARJORIE. Oh, yes, he's coming to see me—he said, very soon. I hope you will like him. But I'm sure you

will—every one does. And though he's been away for years, living out in wild places and among savage people, it hasn't seemed to roughen him at all.

ESTHER (*a little anxiously*). A bachelor?

MARJORIE (*dreamily*). Yes. He told me why he has never married. There was a girl, years ago, whom he loved very much. She died, I think. He didn't tell me her name, but he said that sometimes I reminded him very much of her. He made me feel quite proud that I was like her.

ESTHER. And what does he look like?

MARJORIE. Oh, tall and well built, with fine eyes, but it's not so much his looks.

ESTHER. And his hair? (*Smiles.*) I presume it's not red, or he could never be so popular.

MARJORIE. Oh, no, his hair is gray.

ESTHER. Gray. Do you mean prematurely so? Is he young?

MARJORIE. No, he's not young. I thought I told you, he's quite old—he must be forty-five. That's why I had such confidence in him.

ESTHER. Oh—I always thought, dear, that, well, never mind. But I hope my Marjorie is not going to be fickle.

MARJORIE (*jumping up*). Now you mustn't scold. On my first day at home, too. I shan't say anything more about him. Wait until you see him. I shall leave you to judge.

ESTHER. To judge—what, Marjorie?

MARJORIE. Well (*pausing*), well, to judge if he is not a friend worth having.

ESTHER. And his name, Marjorie—you haven't told me his name yet.

MARJORIE. His name—it's such a nice one—Richard Mortimer. (ESTHER *rises and takes hold of chair.*) Don't you like it?

ESTHER (*dazed*). Richard Mortimer.

(MARJORIE *walks about, examining curtain and bed quilt.*)

MARJORIE. What's this old trunk doing here, Aunt Esther?

ESTHER. Richard—I wonder, after all these years.

MARJORIE. Oh, here's a little old-fashioned blue dress. Was it yours, Auntie?

ESTHER. Yes.

MARJORIE. When did you wear it?

ESTHER (*absently*). Wear it? Oh—when I was a girl, in Roseville.

(*She goes and stands looking into fire.*)

MARJORIE. Oh, see all the little tucks put in by hand. And the pretty white satin bow. I wonder if it would fit me. It would be fun to try it on. May I? (*ESTHER does not hear her.*) 'May I put it on, Aunt Esther?

ESTHER (*turning suddenly*). Put it on? Why, Marjorie, why —

MARJORIE. Oh, yes, just for fun. It's so quaint and old-fashioned. I would look like you when you were a girl.

ESTHER. No, no, don't put it on.

MARJORIE. Please let me. You never have denied me a harmless fancy.

ESTHER. I'd rather you did not.

MARJORIE. I don't see what harm I would do it.

ESTHER (*slowly*). Very well, put it on.

MARJORIE. Oh, thank you. I'll surprise Libbie.

(*Runs off R. with gown over arm. ESTHER sinks into chair and buries her face in her hands.*)

(*Enter LIBBIE, L., carrying tray with tea things.*)

LIBBIE. A good cup o' tea is what you want. I know how I feel along about this time of day. (*Puts tray on table.*) Why, Miss Esther, ma'am, what's the trouble?

ESTHER. Oh, nothing, nothing.

(*LIBBIE pours out a cup of tea and brings it to her.*)

LIBBIE. There, drink that and perhaps you'll feel better.

ESTHER. Thank you. (*Takes cup and with other hand clasps that of LIBBIE.*) I still have you left, Libbie.

LIBBIE. I don't know jest rightly why you talk like this, but you'll have me till I'm taken out for the last time. Oh, is it that Miss Marjorie is going to leave us?

ESTHER. Perhaps.

LIBBIE. I'm not surprised at that. It's no more than I've expected for a long time. I told you she wasn't a child

no more. And if she is going to be happy, that's all you want, ain't it, ma'am?

ESTHER (*tremulously*). Of course—if she's happy. That's what I've lived for, to make Marjorie happy; and after all these years I surely should not hesitate. You do right to remind me of that, Libbie. She is young, I am old.

LIBBIE. Depend on it, Miss Marjorie will always have you with her—no matter whom she marries.

ESTHER (*agitated*). Oh, that would be impossible. I couldn't think of it.

LIBBIE. You've been like a mother to her. I wouldn't think much of the man who would separate you.

ESTHER. Oh, but you don't understand, you don't understand, Libbie.

LIBBIE (*cheerfully*). I'll do my best if you'll explain to me, ma'am.

ESTHER. Libbie, I have just heard that Mr. Mortimer—is alive.

LIBBIE. Not Mr. Richard Mortimer. After all these years. You'll write to him then, to-day.

ESTHER. No, no.

(*A ring at C. ESTHER starts and half rises from chair.*)

LIBBIE. Now, I wonder who that can be, on such a day. Mr. Jack, I guess. He's heard Miss Marjorie is home.

(*Exit LIBBIE, L. ESTHER rises, puts down cup and leans on mantel.*)

(*Enter MARJORIE. She has a rose in her hair and carries the blue gown over her arm.*)

MARJORIE. Oh, who was that at the door?

ESTHER. Libbie has gone to see. So you—you didn't put it on?

MARJORIE. 'No. I was looking at those roses in my room. They are simply perfect.

(*Pats the rose in her hair, and glances in mirror. She still holds dress on her arm.*)

(*Enter LIBBIE.*)

LIBBIE. My land, Miss Marjorie! but you're the livin'

image of your aunt when she was twenty. There, I can just see her now with her bright hair and her little slim figure.

ESTHER. Who was at the door, Libbie?

LIBBIE. A letter for Miss Marjorie with one of them special stamps. (MARJORIE *takes letter*.) I was sure it was Mr. Jack. He's eternally ringin' at the front door.

MARJORIE (*eagerly*). But not lately.

LIBBIE. Well, he was here yesterday and the day before that and the day before that again. I guess you might call that lately.

MARJORIE. Oh, did he send those roses that are in my room?

LIBBIE. Oh, yes, he sent 'em, and some new books for you in the parlor. He's liber'l and good enough. If 'twasn't for his hair. (*Meaningly*.)

MARJORIE (*with feeling*). Why didn't you tell me before? You might have written. I've never heard — And I wish you'd leave his hair alone, Libbie. He never did you any harm.

LIBBIE. Sakes alive! What next?

(*Exits, crossly.*)

(MARJORIE *lays blue gown over the back of a chair, and breaks seal of letter, dropping envelope on floor.*)

MARJORIE. Excuse me, Aunt Esther. (*Glances over it.*) It's from Mr. Mortimer.

ESTHER. He writes—to you.

(MARJORIE *is absorbed in her letter.*)

MARJORIE. Oh, how strange!—Oh, Aunt Esther—I never heard —

ESTHER. What is it? What is it? He's not ill—tell me quick.

MARJORIE (*reproachfully and looking up*). And you never told me. Here, take the letter. You must read it. It is meant for you.

(ESTHER *takes the letter.*)

ESTHER (*reading aloud*). "My dear Miss Marjorie: Your letter has just come in answer to my request for permission to call on you at your home. Why did you never

mention your aunt's name? You will perhaps remember my telling you of the young girl I loved years ago and of whom you so much reminded me. Now I know the reason of that resemblance. That girl, whom I thought dead, is your aunt."

(ESTHER drops the letter and covers her face with her hands.)

MARJORIE. Oh, go on, go on. I read no further.

ESTHER. I cannot —

(MARJORIE goes to her, kneels beside her, and taking up the letter reads it.)

MARJORIE. "Eighteen years ago I went back to the old house in Roseville, and found it occupied by strangers. I heard that Esther Farling was dead. I have been all over the world since then trying to forget her, but I never did. When I saw you at the dance that evening your face brought back to me a rush of old memories. I was immensely attracted to you. I could not tell why. Now I know. Esther Farling is living. That is the wonderful thing I keep telling myself over and over. Now, my dear little friend, it is she who must write and tell me to come. I know you will understand. Tell her one word from her is enough. Sincerely yours, Richard Mortimer." (*Puts the letter in her aunt's hands and rises.*) And it was you all the time, you. And you will write to him now.

(*Enter LIBBIE.*)

LIBBIE. 'Scuse me, please, ma'am, but there's Mr. Jack outside with a sleigh, and wants to take Miss Marjorie for a ride. I told him she was busy —

MARJORIE. Why did you do that?

LIBBIE. Well, he wouldn't take no for an answer. You know his way.

MARJORIE. Don't I, though? Tell him—no, never mind, I'll go myself. But promise me first, Aunt Esther, you will write.

ESTHER. I will.

MARJORIE. Oh, Aunt Esther, I didn't tell the truth. I said I hated red hair, and I don't. I love it, I love it. (*Starts to run off R., but sees the envelope where she has*

dropped it on floor and picks it up.) Oh, there's something else in the envelope. *(Pulls out a knot of white ribbon.)* Why, it's—— Oh, I know. *(She takes the blue gown from chair, lays the ribbon in its place against it, and holds both out to ESTHER.)* Look, Aunt Esther! This belongs to the little blue gown, doesn't it?

ESTHER *(showing emotion)*. Yes, dear.

MARJORIE *(forcing dress and ribbon into ESTHER's hands)*. Oh, Auntie, why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have worn it for the world. I'm so glad I didn't even put it on. It is yours, Auntie. You must wear it—for him.

ESTHER. Hush, child. I can't. I can't.

MARJORIE. Yes, you can. And you will write to him. *(Whistle heard off.)* Oh, there's Jack. These red-haired men are so impatient. Aunt Esther, you will write? Promise me.

ESTHER. Well, I'll—yes, I will.

MARJORIE. To-day! Now! *(Kisses her aunt.)* Oh, Aunt Esther, I'm so happy, for—for both of us. *(Whistle heard.)* Yes, I'm coming.

(Runs off R.)

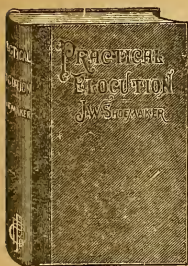
LIBBIE. Save and deliver us! After her raisin', too. Dear knows what will happen next!

(ESTHER lays down the dress, but keeps the knot of white ribbon in her hand.)

ESTHER. Yes, dear knows, Libbie. Well, I promised her. Get me the pen and ink, please, quickly. *(Goes to table.)* Paper, yes, here's some. *(Sits. LIBBIE brings her pen and ink.)* Thank you, Libbie. I'm going to write a letter—to Mr. Richard Mortimer. To think he kept it all these years—that little knot of white ribbon—all these years.

(Sleigh-bells are heard off R. ESTHER sits at desk. One hand holds pen, poised over paper. The other holds the ribbon, at which she looks down, smiling.)

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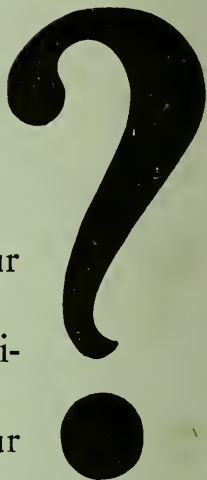
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